

VZCZCXYZ0004
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSP #0783/01 1792036
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 282036Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7044
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 000783

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/28/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: NEW T&T POLITICAL PARTY LOOKS TO DOOKERAN FOR
INSPIRATION

REF: A. PORT OF SPAIN 00488

[1](#)B. PORT OF SPAIN 00676

Classified By: DCM Eugene Sweeney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Gerald Yetming, Member of Parliament formerly with the United National Congress has forged a new political party out of three small, struggling parties. The new party, the Democratic National Alliance, has been formed in Opposition UNC Political Leader "(Winston) Dookeran's image." Yetming strongly believes that the Democratic National Alliance and Dookeran both appeal to a large "third constituency" of voters dissatisfied with both the ruling and opposition parties. It remains to be seen if Yetming and Dookeran will actually join forces and if they will be able to maintain their momentum with voters to win enough seats to dictate which party forms the Government. END SUMMARY.

YETMING'S POLITICAL HISTORY AND PLANS

[1](#)2. (C) Political officer met with Gerald Yetming, a Member of Parliament formerly with the Opposition United National Congress (UNC) but now a back-bencher attempting to forge a new political party. Yetming came to the UNC out of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR), and left when Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj was effectively brought back to the UNC fold in February (ref A). Yetming claims that Maharaj is power hungry and an "evil, dangerous person who is not to be trusted." The only reason, according to Yetming, that Basdeo Panday brought Maharaj back is so that Maharaj could help Panday with his legal troubles. Panday's move may have larger repercussions for the UNC: Yetming asserts that current Leader of the Opposition Kamla Persad-Bissessar may be involuntarily warming the seat for Maharaj. Yetming speculates that Maharaj will eventually be elected as an MP, possibly from Couva North if Panday either resigns his seat or is required to give it up while waiting for appeal. If this is the case, Maharaj will clearly be Panday's "anointed successor" and the UNC rank-and-file will look to Maharaj to become Leader of the Opposition. Rather than Maharaj providing clarity to the UNC leadership, this tension between him and Persad-Bissessar is only exacerbating the current leadership crisis in the UNC.

[1](#)3. (C) After leaving the UNC, Yetming joined the Democratic National Assembly, a small, struggling political party. Recently, the Democratic National Assembly joined forces with the Democratic Political Party of T&T (another small, marginal party) and the remnants of the NAR to form the Democratic National Alliance (DNA). Yetming claims that the DNA only came about because of his leadership.

DISSATISFIED VOTERS MAY SWING PARLIAMENTARY BALANCE

¶4. (C) Yetming believes that, apart from the core supporters of the UNC and the ruling Peoples' National Movement (PNM), most Trinbagonians are fed up with politics as they stand now. He further asserts that this "third constituency" will likely flock to a party that exhibits clear leadership, demonstrates effectiveness and is free of corruption. In Yetming's eyes, Winston Dookeran, embattled Political Leader of the UNC, fulfills these requirements, as would any non-UNC party associated with him. Recognizing this, Yetming is actively courting Dookeran, going so far as to state in a public forum that the DNA's platform was created "in Dookeran's image." Yetming believes that Dookeran will voluntarily leave the UNC rather than wait for the UNC to expel him. Once this happens, Yetming is unsure if Dookeran will actually join the DNA or if he will form his own party. If the latter, Yetming is certain he can form an electoral coalition with Dookeran when the elections are called.

¶5. (C) Given the first-past-the-post electoral system and the ethno-political distribution in T&T, Yetming believes that a party other than the UNC or the PNM has little chance of winning more than two or three seats in the lower House of Representatives. Though numerically small, those few seats actually confer immense political power on the leader of that party: the support of those two seats can be enough to determine which party sits as Government and which as Opposition, making the head of the small party, in essence, a kingmaker. Realistically, Yetming hopes that Dookeran would be able to carry a third party, or a coalition involving the DNA, to victory in enough constituencies to dictate the power distribution in Parliament.

CAN THEY MAINTAIN THE PACE?

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Like Dookeran, Yetming's goal seems to be politics based on issues, not ethnicity. Yet Yetming has a reputation as a standoff opportunist and lacks Dookeran's growing public appeal. Further, if Yetming is truly intent on getting away from personality-based politics, as Dookeran clearly is, his insistence on Dookeran as key to his plans seems somewhat hypocritical, or it might be a realistic reading of his own political weaknesses. Interestingly, his comments about Dookeran's support among the third constituency echo former UNC Senator Robin Montano's assessment (ref B). The question is whether or not Dookeran can maintain his momentum with the people and if Yetming can ride Dookeran's coattails. It will likely be a long road until the next general elections, which we anticipate will not be called before they are required in 2007. END COMMENT.
AUSTIN